

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET

Your farm's water quality is critical to the health of your operation and those downstream. Organic certification evaluates producer practices to maintain or improve water quality on their farm operations.

USDA organic regulations require crops and livestock to be produced in a way that maintains or improves natural resources, including soil and water quality. **7CFR §205.200**

Utilize the below lists to assist you in selecting the practices best suited to your farm.

Crop Producers

Plant and animal nutrients must be applied to crops in a way that keeps nutrients and pathogenic organisms out of water [§205.203(d)]. Organic crop producers use practices to maintain or improve water quality, including, but not limited to:

- Covered or contained storage for organic fertilizers
- Backflow prevention devices on fertigation systems
- Use of organic fertilizers at rates appropriate for crop need
- Vegetated filter strips, natural areas, and application set backs around waterways
- Application of fertilizers when weather conditions won't cause runoff
- Compost additions, cover cropping, and tillage practices that encourage soil life, build structure, lower erosion, and increase soils' ability to hold water and nutrients
- Irrigation practices that promote water efficiency such as soil moisture monitoring and use of low volume irrigation systems, leaving more water for instream flows

Livestock Producers

For farms that also house and pasture livestock, additional steps must be taken to protect water quality. Manure management is specifically addressed in §205.239 and §205.240 of the USDA organic regulations. Organic livestock producers use practices to maintain or improve water quality, including, but not limited to:

- Heavy use areas must be managed in a way that prevents runoff of wastes and contaminated waters to surface water
- Manure storage, outdoor access areas, and pastures must be managed in a way that does not put soil or water quality at risk
- A producer's pasture plan must include a description of erosion control and how they protect natural wetlands and riparian areas

- Animals may be temporarily confined due to inclement weather or risks to soil or water quality
- Composting and other means of legal disposal for livestock mortalities
- Protecting or restoring streamside vegetation, installing off-channel water, and hardening crossings and water access points to protect banks from erosion
- Use of fencing to restrict livestock access to streams or to establish a designated riparian pasture around the stream where the timing and intensity of grazing can be managed
- Capturing and storing manure-contaminated water and liquid seeped from silage, for later use as fertilizer

Many organic livestock farms already have a Washington Nutrient Management Plan or other conservation plan that covers some or all of their farm. Have this plan available at your organic inspection. If you receive regular water quality inspections, have a copy of your most recent report.

Additional practices that protect water quality include:

- Use of roofing, gutters, downspouts, and conveyance lines to keep clean water away from contaminated areas
- Diverting contaminated water to planned filter strip areas
- Protected wellheads

Additional Resources

National Organic Program Guide for Organic Livestock Producers

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Guide-OrganicLivestockProducers.pdf>

Washington Soil Conservation Commission

<http://scc.wa.gov/>

Natural Resource Conservation Service

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Washington State University Extension Livestock Influenced Water Quality Risk Assessment

<http://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2014/03/riskassesstool5105.pdf>

Utah State University Extension Water Quality Risk Self Assessments

<https://extension.usu.edu/waterquality/htm/agriculturewq/riskwater>



WSDA Organic Program
PO Box 42560 | Olympia WA 98504-2560
(360) 902-1805 | organic@agr.wa.gov
<http://agr.wa.gov/organic>